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Input from the Economic Commission for Europe to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits the input from the Economic Commission for Europe to the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

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Input from the Economic Commission for Europe to the high-level political forum on sustainable development

I. Background

1. Following the invitation by the General Assembly in its resolution 67/290 to the United Nations regional commissions to contribute to the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, including through annual regional meetings, and the call made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for strong follow-up and review mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels, member States of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region engaged in a series of informal consultations to determine the modalities for a regional forum on sustainable development, to be held in 2016. Taking into account the ongoing global negotiations on the overall follow-up and review architecture for the 2030 Agenda, and not wanting to pre-empt the outcomes of those negotiations, member States decided to hold the 2016 regional forum as a special informal segment of the eighty-fourth meeting of the Executive Committee of ECE, on 10 May 2016.

2. A meeting between the moderator and non-State actors, which was also attended by interested government delegations, was held before the regional forum on the same day.

3. The regional forum was attended by experts and representatives of Governments, as well as observers from civil society organizations[1] and international organizations. Regional directors and other representatives of 19 United Nations system entities were in attendance.[2] Key messages from civil society organizations and the private sector were addressed to the regional forum by invited speakers. Civil society organizations had coordinated and submitted a position paper relating to the themes of the regional forum.

4. The meeting was preceded by a regional expert group meeting for the preparation of voluntary reviews at the 2016 high-level political forum for the nine volunteering countries from the ECE region, organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in collaboration with ECE on 9 May, and followed by a two-day meeting of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia.

[1] Association for Sustainable Human Development, International Trade Union Confederation, European ECO-Forum, European Environmental Bureau, European Youth Forum, Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development, Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan, Mama-86, Stichting Rutgers WPF, Women in Europe for a Common Future International, World Vision International and WWF International.

[2] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Atomic Energy Agency, International Labour Organization, International Trade Centre, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Children's Fund, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Population Fund, World Tourism Organization, World Health Organization and World Intellectual Property Organization.

5. Together, the four back-to-back meetings formed a "2030 sustainable development week" in the ECE region.

II. Regional forum on sustainable development

6. The eighty-fourth meeting of the Executive Committee of ECE was opened by the Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations in Geneva and Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee, Janis Karklins. The regional forum on sustainable development, as a special informal segment under agenda item 2, was moderated by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations in Geneva, Jan Kara.

Session 1: implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Economic Commission for Europe region: first steps and challenges

7. The key results of a regional survey on planning, implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals,[3] carried out by ECE and the Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia late in 2015 and early in 2016, were jointly presented by the Executive Secretary of ECE and Chair of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, Christian Friis Bach, and the Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States of the United Nations Development Programme and Chair of the Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia, Cihan Sultanoglu.

8. Some clear trends and patterns emerged from the survey, to which 38 out of 56 member States provided answers.

9. National efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda seek to build on existing policy frameworks by updating or adapting existing strategies. This approach is also observed in countries in which the United Nations is represented through resident coordinators and United Nations country teams.

10. The Sustainable Development Goals have an intersectoral character, which is reflected in the extensive use of interministerial coordination structures. Given the complexity of the new 2030 Agenda, significant efforts will be required to identify areas of intervention, adapt the Goals to national and local realities and ensure that the interlinkages between sectoral strategies and programmes are appropriately reflected in policymaking. Progress will depend on awareness of the content and implications of the 2030 Agenda, both within government and beyond. All countries plan to involve stakeholders in the implementation of the Goals, including through particular institutional structures, such as national councils for sustainable development.

11. The provision of norms, standards, legal instruments, policy recommendations and expert advice was mentioned as a key service to be provided by the United Nations system. The degree of possible United Nations involvement in planning and implementation at the national level is quite varied.

[3] Available from www.unece.org/index.php?id=42256.

12. Data quality, availability and disaggregation, monitoring systems and statistical capacities are areas of concern to Governments. Data are essential for effective and transparent monitoring, an area in which the work of the United Nations, at different levels, is deemed particularly significant.

13. Responses from countries with a United Nations presence show that there is strong political will and commitment to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into current national development strategies, build on progress achieved within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, back up implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals with high-level coordination mechanisms and ensure financial support. Nationalization of the Sustainable Development Goals is already ongoing.

14. Most countries with a United Nations presence noted that no specific changes are envisaged in budgetary processes. Existing budgetary frameworks are expected to support the implementation of the nationalized Sustainable Development Goals, which will become fully integrated in national strategies, sectoral programmes and policies. However, the availability of the resources necessary to meet the Goals remains uncertain, which underlines the need for domestic resource mobilization and the development of partnerships.

15. The key frameworks for engagement of the United Nations system in countries with a United Nations presence are the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, which are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. The relevance and usefulness of the Development Assistance Frameworks, which are a tangible outcome of the coordination work carried out by the United Nations system, were recognized.

16. The insights gained from the regional survey are complemented by and fully aligned with the responses received from a needs assessment survey conducted by the Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia among the resident coordinators and United Nations country teams at the end of 2015.[4]

17. The important role of the private sector in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was highlighted in a statement submitted by the Managing Director of Global Policy and Strategic Partnerships of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Carina Larsfälten, and presented by the moderator. It described an ongoing initiative to identify the business opportunities that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals creates for the private sector, and to develop a comprehensive map of how businesses can contribute to the achievement of the Goals. It was argued that it made sense for the business sector to engage in sustainable development at a far more strategic level than had been the case so far. There were new business models that could align profitability with social purpose and new financial tools that could "crowd in" private capital. However, there were also responsibilities that the business sector needed to embrace in areas crucial to public trust, such as tax, good jobs with fair wages, transparency and accountability.

[4] United Nations Development Group, "Country-level needs for SDG implementation in Europe and Central Asia". Available from https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/SDG-Needs-Assessment_RCs-and-UNCTs-2-December-2015-1.docx.

18. The moderator reported key messages emanating from the meeting held with non-State actors and interested delegations, and stated that civil society organizations were engaging at the national and pan-European levels with Governments on the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the impression gained by the organizations was that further work was required to more effectively address the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda, which should be supported with the cooperation of all ministries and address both domestic and external aspects. There was a need to develop more interlinked structures that brought all relevant actors — Governments, as well as the United Nations system and civil society — together.

19. Civil society organizations stated that they had not yet been invited to cooperate in the elaboration of national implementation strategies and plans in most countries. In their view, strong participatory processes were necessary to enable the public and civil society organizations alike to contribute to the design and implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all stages and to engage systematically in monitoring, review and accountability processes. National councils for sustainable development should serve as important mechanisms for the coordination, monitoring and review of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Civil society organizations recognized the importance of the United Nations system in capacity-building, including on statistics, to support implementation of the Goals at the request of countries.

20. In their interventions, representatives of member States echoed and developed some of the key issues that appeared in the regional survey. A number of countries presented their ongoing initiatives with regard to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The overall approach was to refrain from the creation of new structures and processes, but rather to embed the Goals in existing policy frameworks and mechanisms.

21. Significant emphasis was placed on the need for broad stakeholder involvement at different stages, including in the preparation and updating of strategies, adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals to local circumstances, monitoring and reporting. There was support for a transparent, inclusive and participatory process with broad, multi-stakeholder participation. In particular, monitoring systems could be strengthened through greater public engagement in policy development and reporting on implementation. This wide involvement could be made possible through appropriate institutional structures and participatory mechanisms. In some countries, organizations were also encouraged to make specific commitments to support implementation.

22. The critical role of coordination was also remarked on by representatives of various member States. As demonstrated by the results of the regional survey, there was a need to involve different ministries, including those that might have not been traditionally concerned with sustainable development issues. Some countries mentioned the importance of having a "whole of government" approach, most often led at the highest political level, to appropriately address the interconnected nature of the Sustainable Development Goals. Sectoral strategies needed to appropriately reflect the Goals. It was also necessary to extend this coordination to the initiatives of different levels of government — central, regional and local — all of which were called upon to play an important role in the implementation of the Goals.

23. Representatives of member States emphasized the importance of data for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Appropriate assessments of the existing situation were required for the formulation of suitable policies that should be supported by good-quality data to help the understanding of needs and the monitoring of the impact of policies. Disaggregation was important to ensure that statistical averages did not mask inequalities. Data might come from different sources, so effective coordination would be necessary. Statistical institutions might need to be strengthened in some countries and the quality of data improved. Some countries would welcome guidelines on common reporting that would facilitate the fulfilment of different obligations.

24. The indivisible nature of the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to avoid giving excessive relevance to some of the Goals was also remarked on by delegates. While some issues might receive particular policy attention, the definition of priorities should not lead to "cherry picking" that created distortions or failed to address the interlinkages between Goals. There was also recognition that some elements at the global level or within existing integration arrangements were still missing.

25. Following the interventions of Governments, regional and other representatives of organizations of the United Nations system reflected on questions emerging from the regional survey and the interventions of member States. Reference was made to the significant challenges in collecting appropriate data, notably in the area of gender. Disaggregation down to the local level was considered important to ensure that nobody was left behind. Additional resources would be required to support those efforts, as current data gaps were very large. The importance of the collaboration of all stakeholders was also evident from a sectoral perspective, for example, in agriculture. Partners for broader outreach activities could be found through sectoral work, for example, in tourism. Issue-based coalitions should be established to engage multiple stakeholders and drive progress. The promotion of interministerial work would be a key element for success.

26. United Nations system entities highlighted existing strategic policy frameworks that already reflected the concerns of the Sustainable Development Goals and could be used to further their implementation, as was the case in health and social justice. There were also mechanisms that allowed for the involvement of the private sector, for example, with regard to labour issues. Overall, instruments and mechanisms available in the United Nations system in different areas, including human rights, gender and population, could be used to support the implementation of the Goals. Work carried out under the mandates of international conferences, including analysis at the national level, could provide necessary and useful inputs for the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.

Session 2: possible elements of a future regional follow-up and review mechanism for the 2030 Agenda

27. Mr. Bach highlighted a number of key points from the regional survey relating to follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. In their replies, Governments underscored the need for a multilayered follow-up and review architecture for the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals at the national, regional and global levels. At the same time, member States emphasized that any possible future

follow-up and review mechanism at the regional level must build on existing mechanisms and avoid duplication and additional reporting obligations. The mechanism should also integrate and promote cooperation among relevant actors.

28. Mr. Bach described the basic features of a regional follow-up and review mechanism as part of a multilayered architecture. National reviews and monitoring would be connected to the high-level political forum on sustainable development at the regional level. The regional forum on sustainable development could be designed as a "docking station" that integrated existing review mechanisms and a range of different stakeholders.

29. In particular, a number of contributors and inputs could be integrated into a future regional forum. This could include reviews carried out by the eight Sectoral Committees of ECE and other ECE inputs,[5] as well as reviews and inputs from the regional United Nations system, other regional and international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders.

30. Data is essential for effective and transparent monitoring. At its sixty-fourth plenary session, held in Paris from 27 to 29 April 2016, the Conference of European Statisticians discussed extensively the work on statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals and decided on a road map that charted the way forward for selecting regional indicators, clarifying the set-up of reporting on the Goals, assessing the readiness of countries to report, identifying needs for capacity-building, and communicating and disseminating statistics.

31. Looking ahead, a number of issues will require further discussion and clarification in building a regional follow-up and review platform. These include the role of the European Union and other regional and international organizations (the Eurasian Economic Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe) and processes (for example, Environment for Europe, the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health organized by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, the European Regional Meeting of the International Labour Organization and the Regional Conference for Europe of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), and the role of other stakeholders (civil society, the private sector and universities).

32. In her introductory presentation, Ms. Sultanoglu emphasized that one of the key messages emanating from the regional ministerial consultation on accountability for the post-2015 development agenda, held in Geneva on 15 and 16 September 2014, was that any global or regional review mechanism would be rooted in country-level review and reporting. Currently, monitoring and review was the most challenging area relating to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, both with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals indicators and their incorporation into national measurement frameworks. Even though the global Sustainable Development Goals indicator framework had been endorsed by the Statistical Commission, challenges remained for further methodological work, as well as complexities of data collection at the global, regional and country levels.

[5] In particular, environmental performance reviews, country profiles on housing and land management, innovation performance reviews, studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, road maps for mainstreaming ageing, global assessments of national statistical systems and reviews and implementation mechanisms within legally binding conventions.

33. Ms. Sultanoglu highlighted three major challenges at the country level. First, to ensure proper monitoring and data collection, countries would need support in either strengthening the existing monitoring systems or establishing new ones in order to respond to the monitoring and reporting demands of the Sustainable Development Goals. The second challenge was data availability and quality, especially for data disaggregated by income, sex, age, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location or other characteristics to capture inequalities. There was a need for intensified, highly specialized and methodological support for national statistical institutions. Third, extensive statistical capacity-building would be required to support national counterparts in data development, collection and policy use for the implementation of the Goals.

34. In connection with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in September 2015, the role and the "fitness for purpose" of the United Nations system in the implementation of the global sustainable development agenda had been the subject of intergovernmental discussions. Member States' negotiations were ongoing in the framework of the second phase of the Economic and Social Council dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system.

35. At the regional level, coordination and cooperation within the United Nations system had further intensified, in addition to the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Ms. Sultanoglu cited a joint positioning paper by the regional United Nations system in Europe and Central Asia,[6] which was the outcome of a joint retreat held in 2015 and in which some of the main areas of inter-agency cooperation were highlighted. In response to the Sustainable Development Goals, the regional United Nations system would strengthen joint analytical approaches by emphasizing interlinkages between social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development, as well as advocating for building on successes in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and ensuring that current gaps in the Millennium Development Goals were acted upon within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. It would also forge partnerships and intensify joint advocacy by establishing issue-based coalitions and expanding United Nations engagement with various development partners. Promoting the universality of the Sustainable Development Goals was another priority, with a particular focus on the establishment of linkages between those countries with a United Nations presence and those without. Eventually, capacity-building for monitoring, data and review would be another important priority. The regional United Nations system planned to actively engage with national statistical offices to identify gaps and provide tailored support. Internal cooperation within the United Nations would be strengthened by sharing information on and better connecting the available monitoring systems, data collection mechanisms and links to available data sets.

36. The third speaker, the Director of Global Policies and Sustainability of the European Environmental Bureau, Leida Rijnhout, speaking on behalf of civil society organizations, stressed that the participation of all civil society groups in the follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals was important, notably the nine major groups and other stakeholders that are recognized in the global

[6] United Nations Development Group for Europe and Central Asia and Regional Coordination Mechanism, "Joint positioning by the regional UN system in Europe and Central Asia". Available from https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2186_UNDG_Europe_Asia_New-Logo.pdf.

sustainable development process. She stated that civil society was concerned about pushbacks in a number of countries, which restrain civil society space. Civil society also was ready to be present at the various levels of the discussion and had important contributions to make to a regional follow-up and review mechanism, for example, capacity-building, providing second or parallel review and contributing to peer reviews. However, adequate funding was needed for civil society to properly fulfil its role. She suggested the development of regional guidelines on civil society participation. Such instruments as the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) should be widely used to promote public participation. The region should act as an example in terms of inclusivity and make use of good practices that were applied, for instance, at the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme and the high-level political forum. The speaker also introduced "SDG Watch", a Sustainable Development Goal-related platform for more than 70 civil society organizations, which is currently focused on the European Union region and institutions.

37. A number of Governments stressed that follow-up and review mechanisms at the global and regional levels were still under discussion. At the regional level, it was imperative to use existing follow-up and review mechanisms and platforms to avoid any duplication of efforts and to minimize the need for additional resources.

38. With regard to the set-up of regional follow-up and review, some Governments suggested that ECE should act as a convener and should involve the entire regional United Nations system, including specialized agencies, with due regard given to the division of labour among United Nations entities. Relevant United Nations conferences and processes should also be considered. This would require regional follow-up and review efforts to be properly sequenced and synchronized with other existing reviews. ECE should provide its own inputs to regional follow-up and review, in accordance with its mandate. In addition, ECE should seek coordination with the other regional commissions.

39. Many Governments highlighted the need to build an inclusive mechanism that involved stakeholders such as civil society, the private sector and non-United Nations organizations (such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in the follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, one delegation cautioned that the different roles of Governments and other stakeholders needed to be respected.

40. Governments reaffirmed the view expressed in the regional survey on the Sustainable Development Goals that added value could be provided at the regional level in a number of areas. First and foremost, regional reviews could promote voluntary peer learning among groups and immediate neighbours that had similar challenges. United Nations regional actors could be facilitators of such a learning process. The results of the peer learning could also be made available globally. The role of a regional review forum could also be to discuss emerging regional issues, including in preparation for the high-level political forum, and to bring together relevant actors. Regional discussions could be held on the annual theme of the high-level political forum. Data and indicators should be covered, as well as, in particular, transboundary issues, since the regional level provided a unique platform to address such questions. Moreover, the regional level could benefit from a certain focus on broader, cross-cutting themes, such as health, water and tourism, which

would facilitate integrated discussion across a number of Sustainable Development Goals.

41. United Nations system representatives stressed that there were numerous issues requiring cross-sectoral and inter-agency cooperation, such as resilience-building, disaster risk reduction, health care, decent work and environment. In those areas, multi-stakeholder approaches would be crucial to achieve progress.

42. Numerous existing follow-up and review mechanisms, platforms and processes were available within the regional and the broader Geneva-based entities of the United Nations system that could play an important role. This included, for instance, the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, universal periodic reviews that could contribute to strengthened sensitivity on human rights and the European Regional Meeting of the International Labour Organization, held every four years (with the next meeting to be held in October 2017).

III. Next steps and follow-up

43. The Executive Committee decided that the conclusions of the special informal segment of its eighty-fourth meeting, serving as the regional forum on sustainable development, would be forwarded by the Chair as a contribution from the ECE region to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in New York.

44. Furthermore, the Executive Committee agreed to continue, in line with the corresponding outcome of the 2016 high-level political forum on sustainable development, the process of informal consultations on a future regional review mechanism for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the regional level, with a view to taking a decision on the establishment of such a mechanism at the sixty-seventh session of ECE, to be held in April 2017.